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## EDIBLE FRUITED TREES AND SHRUBS COMBINING BEAUTY AND UTILITY

That the old axiom, "you can't have your cake and eat it too", is not infallible, becomes evident when one stops to consider the numerous dual purpose woody plants available today, subjects of value both as ornamentals and as sources of edible fruit. Excluding the strictly commercial varieties such as apples, pears, peaches, cherries and the bush fruits, a number of which have acknowledged decorative traits, we are concerned here entirely with those various woody plants whose ornamental characteristics are supplemented by a noteworthy fruit interest. Combining beauty with utility as these forms do, enables them to assume a dual role in the landscape, a role of special significance where space is a factor and where every plant must deserve the position it occupies.

### Trees

Of the dual purpose trees none has more to offer than the Persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*), widely distributed (south) member of the Ebony Family known especially for its plump orange fruit ripening late in the fall. Frost action is necessary to make it palatable, and even then the flavor and sweetness will vary with the individual. Considering its other interests, the persimmon is always an attractive medium sized shade tree of pyramidal habit while young, round headed later. Its wide angled branches are slender and zig zag and its decorative bark separated into thick, nearly square blocks. The foliage, which somewhat resembles Magnolia, is dark green in summer, orange in the fall, and is displayed in a semi-drooping position. Staminate and pistillate flowers occur on separate trees, necessitating plants of both sexes to insure fruit. Several larger fruited selections are now available in the trade. A number of the Flowering Crabapples belong in the dual purpose class, too, furnishing in addition to attractive

floral displays, usable fruit as well. The profuse white flowered Dolgo Crab (*Malus* "Dolgo") is one, a handsome tree of Russian origin introduced by Dr. Niels E. Hansen, formerly of the South Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station. Coloring early—in August, the interestingly shaped  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inch diameter miniature apples change during the ripening process from yellow (red cheeked) to glowing scarlet. Of good flavor, they may be eaten directly from the tree or made into jelly. Pink flowered Hopa Crab (*Malus* "Hopa"), another floriferous Hansen origination, also bears showy orange to bright red apples of culinary value. Although not as large, the pretty, mealy fleshed soft yellow fruit of *Malus* "Gibbs Golden Gage," an English selection originating at Aldenham House Gardens in Hertfordshire, are quite pleasing in flavor. Pink budded white flowers provide the trees' spring effect. One of the so called Rosybloom Crab-apples, (*x Malus* "Cowichan") deserves mention also, first; because it is an annual bearer, producing its  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inch diameter purplish red apples regularly; secondly, because of the effectiveness of its early appearing light pink flowers. A word for the foliage, too, which has a bronzy green cast changing to brilliant orange red in autumn. The Redflesh Crabapple, (*x Malus* "Redflesh"), has still deeper and very fragrant rose pink blooms (early-midseason) and large ( $1\frac{1}{2}$  inch diam.) bright red apples. They are red fleshed and useful for jellies and preserves. This is another Hansen introduction.

Although susceptible to climatic extremes, the picturesque Asiatic Ansu Apricot, (*Prunus armeniaca ansu*), is most certainly a tree for consideration. Its plump deep pink flower buds are among the first of the *Prunus* to open and if the winter has been mild the resultant pink floral display is lovely to see. Yellowish, red cheeked apricots follow in summer, small but flavorsome. There are several larger fruited clones in cultivation. Several trees are necessary to insure proper pollination. Not to be overlooked either, is the Wild Plum (*Prunus americana*), native species occurring in undulating thickets along fence rows and woodland margins. It not only dominates the early spring landscape with its foamy, honey-scented white blossoms, but provides a rich harvest of edible red plums in the fall as well. Ripe cherries in late October! Not actually cherries, but small red plums so cherry-like in size, shape and coloring that only a taxonomist can distinguish between them—these are the unusual fruits of the Hortulana Plum (*Prunus hortulana*), single trunked arborescent species of limited distribution in the central midwest. Too tart in flavor to be eaten raw, the fruit's only economic value is for jellies. From the standpoint of lateness and attractiveness, however, they are unequalled. Their exfoliating bark and long narrow leaves are further distinctions.

Mulberries, so often avoided because of the litter resulting from the fallen fruit, should not be ignored entirely. Some forms such as the

Everbearing Mulberry (*Morus* species "American") produce berries of excellent flavor, and most species are fast growing round headed trees with dense bright green variably shaped leaves. Birds find their fruit irresistible. Although childhood memories of redhaws may be altered by time, the fact remains that the Downy Hawthorn (*Crataegus mollis*) producing them is the earliest flowering (early May) and one of the tallest of the hawthorns. Unusually large leaves are also typical of the tree and its fruits often reach an inch in diameter. Another small tree group contributing generously to the beauty and bounty of the landscape are the Juneberries or Shadblows. Misty white flowers in early spring, large and often surprisingly sweet flavored fruit in June, orange to terra cotta and old gold foliage color in the fall and distinctive gray bark in winter assure no lagging of interest whatever the season. The Allegheny Shadblow (*Amelanchier laevis*), a multiple trunked small tree is one of the best, although the Apple or Snowy Shadblow (*Amelanchier grandiflora*), has a picturesque spreading growth habit and larger, whiter flowers in loose pendulous racemes.

### Shrubs

While perhaps not feasible to attempt a shrubbery planting solely of dual purpose shrubs, a number of the better ones may be incorporated into the landscape scheme to good advantage. One little used native of interest primarily for its distinctively flavored, three to five inch banana shaped fruit is the Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*), noteworthy in that it is the only member of the tropical Custard Apple Family hardy in the north. Occurring both as a bold leaved clumpy bush and as a small tree, it is most suitable for naturalistic planting in partly shaded areas where the soil is deep and moisture abundant. Not everyone may relish the sweet flavored pawpaws ripening in late fall, but both they and the three parted purplish blossoms appearing with the unfolding leaves are unusual. Everyone knows the flamboyant blossoms of the Japanese Quince (*Chaenomeles lagenaria*), but many may be unaware of the piquant flavor ripe quince fruits can give to jams and jellies. It is a fine, early flowering border shrub useful in any sunny location. And, if a flowering hedge is desired Japanese Quince is one shrub which blooms and fruits well despite clipping. The Common Garden Quince (*Cydonia oblonga*) is a taller growing species lacking the glossy foliage of the Japanese forms but with larger, pinkish white flowers of handsome appearance. Larger fruit is a further distinction, fruit best eaten cooked, alone or combined with apples or pears. The two Cornelian-cherry Dogwoods, *Cornus mas*, and its Japanese relative (*Cornus officinalis*), both rate high on any list of edible fruited plants. Precocious yellow flowers preceding the Forsythias, splendid lustrous green summer foliage and prodigious quantities of oblong red fruit in the fall are the major



attractions. The Japanese Corneliancherry Dogwood is the better of the two, however, opening its larger flowers a week earlier and ripening its larger more abundant fruit later in the fall. Attractively colored jelly of delectable flavor may be made from the tart fruit of either.

One would expect the *Prunus* clan to add a number of worthy subjects to our list and so it does, shrubs such as the Purpleleaf Sandcherry (*Prunus cistena*), a medium sized plant with lively reddish purple foliage remaining unchanged throughout the growing season and edible purplish black fruit in autumn; the European and Asiatic Blackthorn or Sloe (*Prunus spinosa*), tall bush of interesting twiggy growth bearing white flowers in May before the leaves and sizeable bright blue fruit in fall; and that indispensable Oriental, the Nanking Cherry (*Prunus tomentosa*). This earliest flowering species is a tall rounded bush opening its pink buds here in mid or late April, buds developing into fragile, pinkish flushed white flowers borne profusely along the leafless stems. Later, in June, before memories of this floral show are forgotten, half inch diameter bright red cherries of sweet flavor ripen to the gratification of man and bird alike. Another group of shrubby *Prunus* includes such sand or soil stabilizers as the Beach Plum (*Prunus maritima*) of Atlantic coastal areas, the somewhat taller Sand Cherry (*Prunus pumila*), common on the dunes near Lake Michigan, and the geographical variant, the Western Sand Cherry (*Prunus Besseyi*). All three have a certain native picturesqueness evident both in the irregularity of their branch structure and in the homey charm of their creamy flowers. That the flavorful fruits are highly esteemed for jams and jellies is well known.

The spicy scent of yellow Clove Currant (*Ribes odoratum*) blossoms, so reminiscent of May Day, is the feature for which this shrub of old fashioned gardens is best known. The large black fruit ripening in late summer is quite palatable, however, and very much like a gooseberry in appearance. Fruit production necessitates plants of both sexes, but unfortunately use of the female (pistillate) form is discouraged due to its being one of the alternate hosts of white pine blister rust. The Viking Currant, (*Ribes* "Viking"), a selection received some years ago from Prof. A. J. Riker of the University of Wisconsin, has the advantage of being rust resistant as well as being known for its uniform habit of growth and edible red fruit. We have found it a very satisfactory clipped hedge material. Although not edible in the same sense as the other shrubs mentioned, the showy Chinese red hips of the Rugosa Rose (*Rosa rugosa*) are a rich source of vitamin C. The common name, "Sea Tomato", by which the shrub is known in its native Japan, is derived from the size (1 in. diam.) and shape of the conspicuous fruit. Dark green, coarsely veined leaves provide a most effective setting for both it and the large single

rose pink blooms. Everyone knows the Elderberry or American Elder (*Sambucus canadensis*), roadside shrub with creamy flat inflorescences whose fragrance is the very essence of summer itself. In August the juicy purplish black berries ripen to the delight of birds and to everyone who values them for pies, wine and jellies. An improved variety, "Adams", has been selected on the basis of its larger clusters of extra sized fruits. Being vigorous growers, the Elders are too coarse for any but large scale plantings. The shrubby Silver Buffalo Berry (*Shepherdia argentea*), one of the lesser known natives, owes its interest largely to the peculiar silvery or grayish metallic lustre coating its twigs and leaves, although the showy scarlet currant sized fruit is often borne so abundantly as to give the entire bush a ruddy cast. An agreeable acid flavor a bit on the astringent side characterizes the fruit. Plants are dioecious (sexes separate). Where an acid soil can be provided and maintained the Highbush Blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*) can be a most rewarding shrub. For not only are its sizeable frosty blue fruits flavorsome and of attractive appearance, but the small bell shaped white flowers pretty as well. Highest praise must be given the autumn color of the foliage which is of the most brilliant scarlet hue imaginable. The cultivated Blueberries (*Vaccinium* in variety), are equally spectacular in the fall and have the additional advantage of larger, more abundant fruit. Acidity is, of course, essential to their successful growth. Viburnums, versatile though they are, are not as a rule considered from an economic standpoint. Some years ago, however, the United States Department of Agriculture selected three seedling forms of the American Cranberrybush Viburnum (*Viburnum trilobum*) specifically because of the size, quality, flavor and high pectin content of their fruit. These were "Wentworth", the first to ripen its large red berries (August), "Hahs", a midseason variety of more erect habit; and, "Andrews", with very large, late maturing fruits. All three are first class ornamentals attractive in flower and with good foliage assuming brilliant autumn tints. Another Viburnum whose fruit is considered of value for jellies and jams is the native Blackhaw (*Viburnum prunifolium*), tall bush having all the good attributes of the genus. Unlike the Cranberrybush Viburnum its oval shaped berries are blue black.

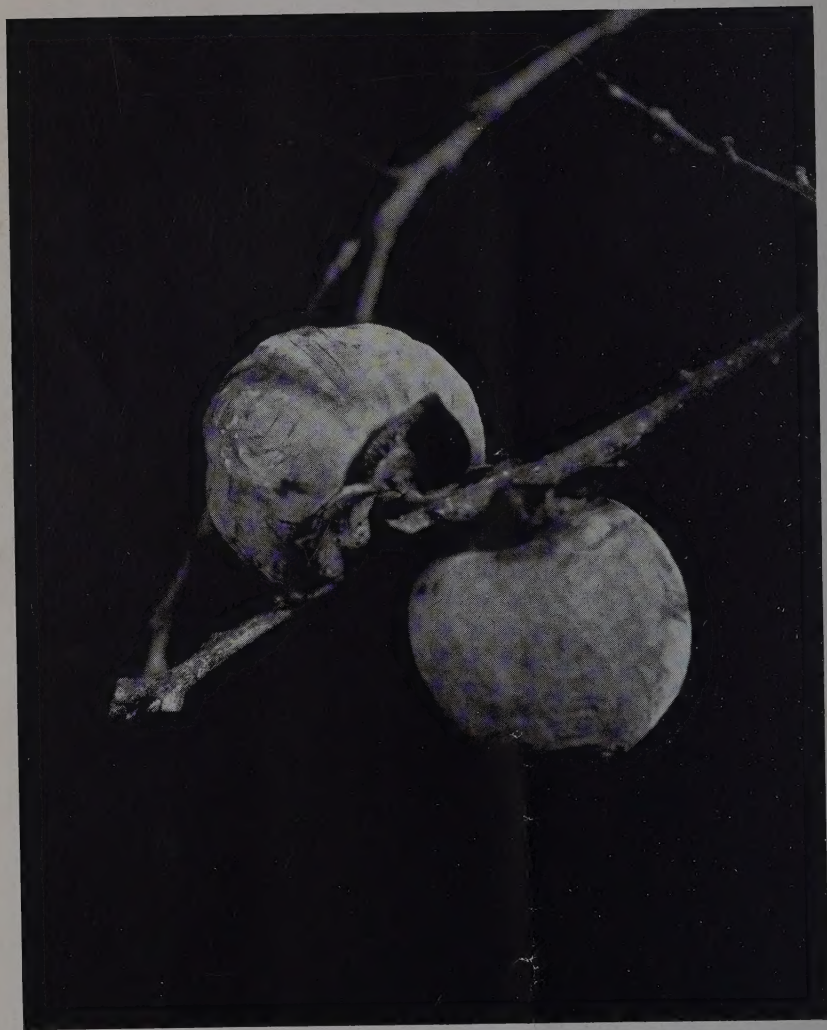
E. L. Kammerer

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Persimmon Fruit (*Diospyros virginiana* L.)